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**Congress of the United States**  
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Senior Whip

November 3, 2015

Dr. Rush Holt  
Chief Executive Officer and Executive Publisher, Science  
American Association for the Advancement of Science  
1200 New York Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Dr. Holt:

Last year, on July 24, 2014, I wrote to AAAS about the difficulties faced by women in science. My previous letter was in response to two events: an offensive July 11, 2014 *Science* cover depicting headless, sexualized transgender women, and a peer-reviewed study that found rampant sexual abuse and harassment in scientific field expeditions. In the ensuing year, AAAS has apologized for the cover, which I very much appreciate, but the second part of my letter has remained unaddressed.

All of the following incidents have occurred since I wrote to AAAS last July, and demonstrate widespread, pervasive problems for women in science:

- November 12, 2014: On the day that the Rosetta comet mission landed a probe on a moving comet, project scientist Dr. Matt Taylor appeared on international media wearing a shirt printed with nearly-naked pinup girls.<sup>1</sup>
- May 16, 2015: In an interview with NPR, award-winning CalTech astronomer Shrinivas Kulkarni said that scientists are “boys with toys.”<sup>2</sup>
- June 1, 2015: *Science* published a career advice column by Dr. Alice S. Huang telling a female postdoc whose advisor keeps looking down her shirt that she should “put up with it, with good humor if [she] can.”<sup>3</sup> AAAS has since apologized and retracted the column, but it is astonishing that this was published to begin with, particularly given last year’s discussion over the offensive *Science* cover.
- June 8, 2015: In an address to the World Conference of Science Journalists, Nobel laureate Tim Hunt said, “Let me tell you about my trouble with girls ... three things happen when they are in the lab ... You fall in love with them, they fall in love with you and when you criticize them, they cry.” He added that he was in favor of single-sex labs because he didn’t want to “stand in the way of women.”<sup>4</sup>
- July 21, 2015: When asked why he did not work with Brazilian scientists on a Brazilian snake fossil whose discovery was published in *Science*, paleontologist David Martill said, “I mean, do you want me also to have a black person on the team for ethnicity reasons, and a cripple and a woman, and maybe a homosexual too just for a bit of all round balance?”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/20/fashion/the-lessons-of-a-rosetta-scientists-shirt.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.npr.org/2015/05/16/406995846/playing-around-with-telescopes-to-explore-secrets-of-the-universe>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/06/02/aaas-pulls-sexist-advice-column-amid-outcry-readers>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/10/nobel-scientist-tim-hunt-female-scientists-cause-trouble-for-men-in-labs>

<sup>5</sup> <http://ciencia.estadao.com.br/blogs/herton-escobar/author-of-4-legged-snake-paper-defies-brazilian-fossil-laws/>

- October 9, 2015: A UC Berkeley investigation into prominent astronomer Geoff Marcy revealed that he had engaged in inappropriate physical behavior with students, including unwanted massages, kisses, and groping. After the investigation revealed years of this type of behavior, UC Berkeley only issued him a light warning, though he has since resigned.<sup>6</sup>
- October 24, 2015: In anthropology, a field where more than 60% of graduate degrees are awarded to women, critics of an expedition that discovered a new species of human were granted anonymity in *The Observer* to call the all-female caving team a “publicity stunt.”<sup>7</sup>

Women who speak out about these incidents have been subjected to torrents of online abuse, including rape and death threats.<sup>8</sup> Female scientists from underrepresented minorities, already a small group, have been subjected to even more vociferous abuse and have received limited support from scientific institutions.<sup>9</sup>

The scientific community’s lack of response to sexual harassment may be partially explained by a disturbing study published last month in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. It showed that men, particularly male STEM faculty, evaluated the quality of research documenting gender bias in STEM more harshly than research that did not show bias.<sup>10</sup> In other words, male scientists were less likely to believe even quantitative scientific data that gender bias exists in STEM. We cannot welcome women and underrepresented minorities to science if we cannot even acknowledge that bias exists.

In our last meeting, I asked former AAAS CEO Dr. Alan Leshner to take a closer look at AAAS’ own policies, and to lead the way in combating science as a hostile work environment. To that end, Dr. Leshner had said that he would consider conducting a study of the gender breakdown of the *Science* peer-reviewed article triage process – i.e., seeing if there was bias in which articles were sent out for review. I would like to meet to discuss if such a study is still being considered, and to suggest other actions that AAAS might take to help make science less hostile to women and minorities. The recent editorial in *Science* from Dr. Bernard Wood<sup>11</sup> is a fine example of leadership, and I hope to see more efforts like this in the future.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while we are in the midst of exploring the solar system, unlocking the human genome, and creating ever-more-advanced technology, the demographics and attitudes of scientists and engineers must not be trapped in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Women and minorities in science should be able to concentrate on discovery, not on avoiding harassment and defending their very existence in their fields. I look forward to discussing how AAAS can help to further advance diversity in STEM. The future of science should be welcoming to all.

Sincerely,



Jackie Speier

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2015/10/12/superstar-astronomer-sexually-harassed-students-for-years-according-to-investigation/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/oct/25/discovery-human-species-accused-of-rushing-errors>

<sup>8</sup> <http://jezebel.com/woman-gets-death-threats-for-tweeting-about-disliking-a-1658337612>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx\\_factor/2013/10/14/danielle\\_lee\\_called\\_an\\_urban\\_whore\\_how\\_scientific\\_american\\_bungled\\_the\\_racist.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2013/10/14/danielle_lee_called_an_urban_whore_how_scientific_american_bungled_the_racist.html)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2015/10/06/1510649112.abstract>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/350/6260/487.full>